



# INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT SENIOR GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS



April 6, 2004

Roanoke City School Board Audit Committee  
Roanoke, Virginia

We have completed an audit of the graduation requirements for the 2003 Roanoke City Public School graduates. We performed this audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

## **BACKGROUND**

In February 2003, we completed an audit of seniors' cumulative records to verify that students met the proper requirements necessary to receive their chosen diplomas. At that time, based on a statistical sample, we projected that all senior students that were anticipating receiving a diploma had met the necessary requirements and were on target to receive their chosen diploma. The School Administration requested that we perform another audit in 2004 to determine if the 2003 graduates received the proper diploma in accordance with State requirements, based on their final academic records.

The Virginia Board of Education regulation *8 VAC 20-131-50* sets forth the requirements for standard, advanced studies, and modified standard diplomas. The requirements specify the level of courses and subject area disciplines students must complete to earn a credit in the areas of mathematics, laboratory science, history, and social science, as well as the credit requirements in other content disciplines. The regulations also specify that the Board of Education can approve alternative courses to satisfy the requirements. The class of 2003 had the following credit requirements:

- Standard Diploma - 22 standard units of credit
- Advanced Studies Diploma - 24 standard units of credit
- Modified Standard Diploma - 20 standard units of credit

In order to receive any of these diplomas, students in the class of 2003 were also required to have passed the literacy passport test (LPT).

The Roanoke City Public School system offers the diplomas mentioned above along with two additional diplomas: The "International Baccalaureate" (IB) Diploma (24 standard units of credit) and a "Special" Diploma. The IB Diploma is only offered at William Fleming to students who have completed the

established IB requirements. Special Diplomas are awarded to students with disabilities who complete the requirements of their individualized education program. The Roanoke City Public School system also offers a Certificate of Program Completion for students who have completed their prescribed programs of study but do not qualify for a diploma.

The Guidance staff is responsible for advising students regarding the course work each student will need to earn his or her desired diploma. There is a written document that specifies the responsibilities of Guidance Counselors and a standard checklist that Counselors utilize to help ensure student files are complete. Guidance Counselors are responsible for monitoring their assigned students' progress towards graduation and advising their students regarding scheduling, course selection, program options, and career planning. Counselors are expected to provide each student a minimum of two counseling sessions per year and a minimum of eight counseling sessions during four years of high school. The Guidance staff relies on the Pentamation student records management system, as the official student record, for up-to-date information regarding a student's academic progress.

The Pentamation system is used to maintain course schedules, grades, results of required standardized tests, and diplomas issued for each student. The system is used to produce report cards and official student transcripts. It includes security features that allow individual access to student data to be restricted based on the user's assigned duties and areas of responsibility. Procedures established by the school system are designed to utilize the security features by requiring specific supporting documents be kept on file and by properly segregating duties such as grade verification and grade entry so that important changes to the records require two people to concur.

### **PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this audit was to verify that current procedures are operating effectively to ensure the Roanoke City Public School system is complying with Virginia Board of Education regulation 8 VAC 20-131-50 regarding the requirements for graduation.

### **SCOPE**

The audit focused on William Fleming, Patrick Henry, and Noel C. Taylor's class of 2003 graduates that received a diploma or a Certificate of Program Completion.

### **METHODOLOGY**

We statistically calculated a sample size based on the 2003 graduate class population of 667 students, a desired confidence level of 95%, an expected error rate of 1%, and a desired precision of +/-2.5%. Our results indicated we would need to review the records of 55 students in total. Based on the size of

each school's senior student body, we selected a proportionate number of students for review using interval sampling. We tested 33 student records at Patrick Henry, 21 student records at William Fleming, and 1 student record at Noel C. Taylor. In each case, we obtained the student's cumulative folder and reviewed the student's transcripts and LPT scores on file to ensure that the graduates received the diploma for which they qualified in accordance with regulation 8 VAC 20-131-50.

## **RESULTS**

### **Finding 01 – Diplomas**

We determined that in 53 of 55 student records tested (96.4%), the appropriate diploma was listed on the student's official transcript in accordance with requirements set out by the Virginia Board of Education's regulation 8 VAC 20-131-50. Based on a desired precision of +/- 2.5%, our results translate into a projected error rate of between 1 in 100 and 6 in 100 students whose official transcripts list a standard diploma when the student actually qualified for an advanced studies diploma.

We evaluated the process for entering diploma types into the Pentamation system and found the process to be reasonably sound. The two incorrect diploma entries are believed to be simple human error. Based on records showing the diplomas actually printed and given to students at the graduation ceremony, we believe one of the two students identified in our test received the appropriate diploma with the advanced studies seal. The appropriate seal has been sent to the other student.

### **Agreed Upon Action 01 – Diplomas**

The Pentamation system's transcript module includes a 'Graduation Requirements' function that can help verify each student's diploma type is correct based on the student's course history. In order for this function to be used, the guidance staff will need to input the subject area discipline associated with each class in the course catalog. This is a one time investment in set-up time, requiring changes only when new courses are added to the catalog. The Guidance department plans to input the data necessary to utilize the graduation requirements function by January 30, 2005.

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### **Finding 02 – Course Work History**

Virginia Board of Education regulation 8 VAC 20-161-30 requires that official student transcripts have certain information such as course work with associated grades listed by year. We found two student transcripts that did not accurately reflect the student's completed course work:

- One student transcript did not reflect a half credit course taken in summer school that was required to meet the 22 total credits for a standard diploma. There was documentation on file indicating that the student had completed the half credit course in summer school.
- One student, whose instruction was contracted out to Minnick Education Center for grades 9 through 12, had no course work or grades listed in his Pentamation records for those years as of January 15, 2004. The transcript has since been requested and received from Minnick Education Center, and the Guidance Coordinator has entered the appropriate information into Pentamation.

Both students noted above were awarded the appropriate diplomas.

### **Agreed Upon Action 02 – Course Work History**

The utilization of the graduation requirements function in Pentamation will identify incomplete transcripts enabling school staff to correct the records prior to graduation. The Guidance Coordinator has corrected the student transcripts identified in our test work. The Guidance department also plans to implement a policy requiring contracted education services to provide course work information each semester that will be entered into the student's Pentamation records.

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### **Finding 03 – Independent Studies**

In the course of testing the records, we noted that a grade was awarded to one student for an independent study in public speaking completed in 2001. School Board Policy IKG addresses the requirements for independent studies and is designed to ensure "... all credits accumulated toward graduation requirements are valid, reflect appropriate course rigor, and follow the standards of learning." The policy requires independent studies to be approved by a committee consisting of the School Principal, Guidance Coordinator, subject area Supervisor, and Department Chair one week prior to the course work being undertaken. Upon reviewing the records and interviewing the staff involved, we determined that the independent study in question was not approved by a committee. Furthermore, the course was not entered on the students schedule at the time the instruction was provided and the grades were not posted for nearly 10 months after the course was completed. Normally, grade verification sheets and a grade book should be prepared and retained on file for courses, including independent studies. Neither a grade verification sheet nor any form of grade book was on file for the independent study noted. During the audit, the School Principal identified a second independent study for this student that was also a matter of concern. This course had the proper approvals; however, it was entered on the student's schedule well after the semester had begun. Due to how the course was added to the schedule, the

grades module in Pentamation did not recognize the study as being a valid course and did not produce grade verification sheets or list the grade on the student's transcripts. The missing course and grades were noticed by the parent in November 2003, at which time the school posted the grades.

### **Agreed Upon Action 03 – Independent Studies**

The school system has procedures in place for administering independent studies. The procedures will be revised to state more specifically the responsibilities of the principals and teachers. Principals will now be required to maintain independent study documentation and written approvals on file for five years. The procedures will explicitly state that teachers should expect independent studies to follow the normal processes for attendance and grades. Teachers should expect to receive a computer disk on which they should record grades for uploading into Pentamation, attendance sheets on which attendance will be recorded, and grade verification sheets. Teachers will also be expected to file some form of recorded grades (i.e., grade books) to be kept on file.

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### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of our audit work, we believe that the procedures for administering independent studies and ensuring final transcripts are complete and accurate should be strengthened. We believe the agreed upon actions will help ensure the Roanoke City Public School system complies with the Virginia Board of Education regulation 8 VAC 20-131-50 regarding the requirements for graduation.

We would like to thank the Guidance staff and School Administration for their cooperation and assistance during the audit.

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